

Addressing Skepticism of Medical Humanities in Family Medicine Education.

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BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVES

Assumptions: Family medicine is a post-modern specialty. Post-modern theory is closer to the values and experience of family medicine than the ‘modern’ values of a ‘scientific’ rationalism.

Background: Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is an educational intervention which uses visual art to teach critical thinking, communication, and visual literacy. VTS grew from a methodology for gallery teaching in museums to extensive application in a variety of environments including medical education.

Objectives: What meaning does Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) have for medical trainees within the context of learning in family medicine?

METHODS

Participants were third year undergraduate medical students beginning a six-week clerkship in family medicine. VTS concentrates on process and contextual issues relating to the discipline of family medicine which includes patient-centred approaches. It was given as part of a one-week series of didactic teaching sessions which formed ‘an introduction to family medicine’.

1065 anglophone students enrolled in the mandatory teaching VTS sessions Sep 2011- Dec 2019. The sessions consisted of 3 distinct phases, held at the National Gallery of Canada.

1-Groups of medical students view 4-5 pieces of art according to standard VTS protocol,

2-Immediately after, they convened for a facilitated discussion with a family medicine preceptor to deconstruct the experience.

3- Within 72 hours, they completed a specially designed feedback questionnaire, electronically through the one45 system. The questionnaire asked two specific questions:

a. *What do you think about the teaching session itself?*

b. *What do you think about your own personal experience with this session?*

A qualitative study using directed content analysis was undertaken to explore themes arising from the collected data. Generated dataset was coded manually on Nvivo.

RESULTS

Feedback showed a general satisfaction with 77% of comments positive, with 6% of them being ‘bridging’ comments & the remaining 23% comments as negative.

QUOTES

Negative

“I fear that I will complete this rotation having great communication skills, without any actual medical knowledge to communicate. VTS sessions are best left for CME events, not within undergraduate curriculum.”

Positive

“...there was a lot of opportunity to participate, give input & communicate with peers. It gives family medicine a different angle than the other specialties because it focuses on the narrative & art of communication as opposed to pure science and skill. It was a very useful & unique session to have during family medicine rotation. It stimulated new thoughts & insights about how we communicate with patients & how our impressions can inform our judgments.”

Bridging

“This was a unique learning session that I actually found very interesting despite much skepticism going into it. I felt that I was able to develop some critical thinking skills that link closely with clinical work.”

DISCUSSION

Negative comments could be divided into subgroups:

1. *Practical points on content/process & medical education:*
 - Relevance to the curriculum
 - Clarity of learning objectives or relationship to relevant outcomes
 - Some artwork was culturally insensitive, exclusionary or western centric
 - “I get it, but it doesn’t fit my learning style”
2. *Problems with values & expectations- philosophical implications of using humanities:*
 - “This is important, but I have other priorities (biomedicine)”
 - “I got no new insights”
 - “It was important to get the ‘right answer’”

Bridging comments: Initially coded as ‘positive comments’, showed initial skepticism but then found session of value.

CONCLUSIONS

Medical humanities plays a central role in addressing specific competencies within the curriculum of family medicine education. Practical approaches to dealing with skepticism when using humanities resources can be mitigated to some extent by attention to basic educational principles : constructive alignment, understanding experiential learning, social learning theory, & embracing post-modern theory & constructivist approaches.

REFERENCES

Housen 2002, Allison, Mulay, & Kidd 2017; Moorman, Hensel, & Decker 2016; Reilly, Ring, & Duke, 2005; Miller, Khoshbin, Katz 2013.

